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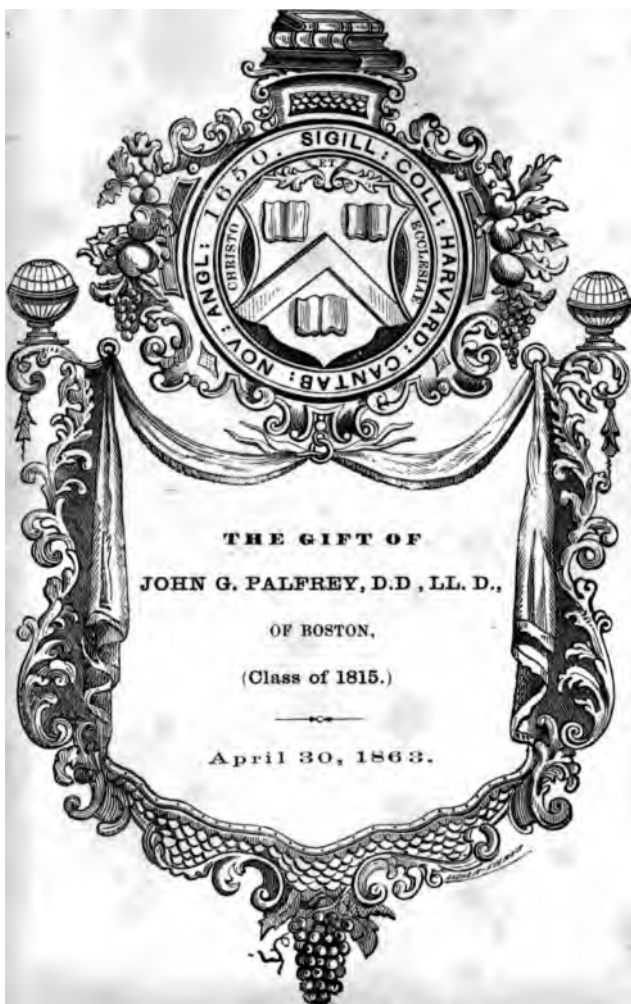
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SOBER THOUGHTS

ON THE

STATE OF THE TIMES,

ADDRESSED TO THE

UNITARIAN COMMUNITY.

*By Henry Ware, D.*



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## SOBER THOUGHTS

ON THE

STATE OF THE TIMES.

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TWENTY years of controversy have just passed by. It has been a season, we may suppose, much like that of all controversies, but it has had its own characteristics, and, what is worthy of special observation, it is likely to be followed by more distinct and lasting results than generally happens. A theological discussion of great severity is oftentimes carried on for years, and yet it would be difficult to trace its consequences anywhere, excepting in the books which have been written, and which are themselves soon forgotten. But in the present instance a broad mark has been left upon the very face of society, a permanent change has been effected in some of its institutions, and in the relations of its members. For it has been one of that series of struggles for liberty and light, which began at the open-

ing of the Reformation in Germany three hundred years ago, and which is pushing on step by step toward the completion of that immortal work. Society advances in opinion, in knowledge, in institutions, by some great effort of its powerful minds, and then pauses for a time, — as if to secure and consolidate what is gained. Then another effort, agitation, and advancement, and again another pause. During these pauses, it may seem stationary, it may even appear to the apprehensive mind, retrograde ; but it is certainly true that revolutions do not go backward ; and though the tide of improvement as it rolls up its glorious waves, may appear to be occasionally retreating, it is only to gather up its might and come on with a firmer swell ; — while dame Partington and all her maids brandish their ancient mops in vain.

It is the rolling in upon the shore of one of these larger swells that has attracted our attention during the last twenty years. The Reformation has been making a vigorous advance. The commotion has been extensive, the tossing has been fearful, the alarm and bustle of those exposed to the spray has been loud and earnest. At length the height of the swell seems to have past. There are symptoms of greater quiet and repose. To change

the figure, the heat of the warfare is over ; the great battle has been fought ; and it is time to look about us and see what is the result, where the world stands, and what use is to be made of the losses and the acquisitions of the contest. I know no more instructive inquiry to the impartial seeker of truth. Who will undertake the investigation ? Perhaps the day for it is not yet fully come ; in order to a satisfactory decision, we must perhaps wait for the termination of several most interesting discussions in various unconnected portions of the christian church, which are now in fervent progress, — all of them growing out of the great action of the principles of the Reformation, all a part of the mighty struggle of the times for liberty and light, all portending salutary change throughout the religious world, and giving to the thoughtful observer auspicious pledges of the sure advent of a day of complete and established reform. Let the people praise thee, O Lord, let all the people praise thee !

It is no part of my design to look at the whole of this most extensive subject. I confine myself to that division of the church, which has stood in the front rank during the recent contest, which has carried furthest the principles of the Reformation, and has conse-

quently suffered (as the leading corps in this cause have always done) from the suspicions, the opposition, and the anathema of the general body of the believers. The majority of those who have reformed to a certain extent, has always been seriously inimical to those who desire to reform further. "They have come to a period in religion," to quote the significant expression of the immortal Robinson, and they call it Orthodoxy. To go a step further, and read the next sentence, is heresy, and heretics of course are not to be tolerated. This intolerable class at the present age is that of Unitarians. They are desiring to press the Reformation beyond the orthodoxy of the present times, just as the Puritans desired to press it beyond the orthodoxy of the English church; and are therefore to be regarded and treated no better than those unfortunate schismatics were treated by the powerful sects around them. Happily, indeed, no *secular* persecution is possible in these days; but doubtless the wicked Puritans of King James's time were not worse in the eyes of the monarch and the church, than the wicked Unitarians now are in the view of the leading powers in church and state.

The recent controversy has been not simply a discussion of opinions, but a contest for

rights ; it has involved questions of reputation for piety, claim to the christian name, and, in some instances, questions of property. It has been the cause of various trying changes in the domestic and social relations ; it has rent asunder long united communities ; it has touched, in all parts of the land and sometimes with a most ungentle hand, many of the tenderest interests and charities of life. With so many circumstances and occasions of exasperation, is it strange that it sometimes, on both sides, took an unhappy tone of bitterness and recrimination ? Are we to wonder, when the excited disputant sat down to his task of argument or defence, and remembered that not only his most sacred opinions were to be shielded, but that momentous results of immediate tangible good and ill, happiness and wretchedness, were at stake, — are we to wonder that he sometimes spoke too warmly, accused too fiercely, answered too indignantly, and was over valiant in the use of provoking and irritating missiles ? There is much of this to be lamented and forgiven on both sides. Must I not add, there were some specimens of debate so coarse, so insulting, so unprincipled, so after the school of the great calumniator, rather than that of Christ, that the writers themselves, can look back upon them only with as-

tonishment and abhorrence! — We had been accustomed to plume ourselves on the decency and politeness of the age. We had quoted the base vulgarities of Luther and Calvin, as the strange ill-manners of a semi-barbarous century, impossible to be permitted in the more decorous intercourse of modern society. Alas, we were made bitterly to know, that no refinement of the age can prevent the atrocities of speech by which a malignant and exasperated bully will delight to vent his own depravity of heart, and flatters himself that men will call it zeal. Let such things be forgiven; but let a mark of reprobation be put on them; let them be hung up in conspicuous places, as a warning to those who shall be called to the next contest, that it is required of a man that he *contend lawfully*, and put away from him *all bitterness, clamor, wrath, evil speaking, and malice*.

Yet, upon the whole, there is much upon which the mind may look back with satisfaction and devout gratitude. Those to whom I write, will not fail to recognise the hand of a wise and gracious Providence in much of the fiery trial through which they have been called to pass. “If the Lord had not been on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath



was kindled against us. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth."

We have much to be thankful for, in the manner in which the discussion on the whole was conducted ; for the vigor, manliness, strength and sobriety, — for the fairness, seriousness, love of truth and spirit of piety, by which it was sustained and imbued ; and for the lofty eloquence of faith and fervent attachment of heart, with which the SOUL of christianity, — its vital and life-giving essence, — was clung to, advocated, appealed for, in the midst of this confounding din about the outworks of opinion. Now that it is so far past, let us gratefully adore the goodness which has brought us through, purified, improved and advanced as a people, rather than consumed, dwindled, deteriorated. We had a conscientious and extreme dislike to controversy. We dreaded its operation as a blight on the kindness of the affections, and the devoutness of the spirit. We entered its perilous way with anxious alarm. But we now find, that our fears did not prophecy truly. Piety has not decayed, religion has not languished, the charities of life have not perished. On the contrary, we seem to have clasped the more closely to our bosom the spiritual treasures of our faith, and to have valued them more highly



than ever. We tested and felt anew their unspeakable worth. And probably practical and vital religion was never more esteemed and prevalent, than at this very time when we are issuing from a storm which seemed destined to destroy it.

This then is the present aspect of our religious affairs. We have discussed with our differing brethren the doctrines respecting which we differed, and the questions are at rest. *The result is, that we are a community by ourselves.* When we began the debate, we were members of the general congregational body, communicants at the same tables, and sheep under the same shepherds. (I speak in general terms.) Now, a separation has taken place. We have our own congregations, our own ministers, our own institutions and instruments of religious improvement. It is a crisis of unspeakable interest to us. We are deeply concerned to know what is the character and power of those institutions, what the nature and operation of our distinctive faith, and how far we are faithful representatives, advocates, stewards, of that pure and glorious Gospel on whose behalf we have been allowed to contend.

I feel oppressed with the magnitude and solemnity of the question I am approaching.

I have looked at it in some moments of retired thought, when I could get far enough from the distracting bustle of this world's interests, to perceive the worth of higher things, and have been overwhelmed as I mused at the vastness of the considerations here involved. I fear that those most concerned, are too insensible to them. I fear that the god of this world is blinding their eyes to the tremendous responsibilities of their position. I know myself to be habitually so careless and unalive to it all, that I am alarmed lest we should be found all sleeping together in a fatal security; and I pray for strength to be able to set forth something of the truth, and to draw to it the attention of my fellow-believers.

I must begin with a statement respecting our community, which is necessary to be carefully considered, in order to a just appreciation of what shall follow. We are familiar with the distinction between *real* and *nominal* christians. Every sect, every congregation, has its nominal adherents, — those, namely, who, from birth, or residence, or policy, or other accidental circumstances, are attached to it, but are not deeply pledged to it as a matter of conscience and salvation. There are such nominal christians everywhere. They are found in our community, as well as in others.

Generally speaking they are regarded in any community, not as a part of the actual efficient force of the camp, nor as the fair representatives of the character and principles of the body. *Neither are they to be accounted such in ours*; — and this is a position to be insisted on. It unavoidably happens, from the circumstances of the case, that our community is encumbered with rather an unusual proportion of these irregular adherents; and it is a fact, not only not to be overlooked, but to be carefully explained, if we would understand aright our situation and our duties.

Let us recollect then, that there are among us two classes of congregations, the old and the new, — originating under different circumstances, and existing beneath different influences. The Old congregations are, many of them, equal in point of antiquity to the country itself; they have very gradually receded from the orthodoxy of the forefathers, and have become what they are without passing through any period of effervescence or convulsion. Such societies, in point of stedfastness, order and general quietness of faith, do not differ from other old societies. But the New congregations have been the creation of the times. They have been formed by schism and secession; and, like all seceders, have

something of a spirit not perfectly accordant with the best condition of personal religion. Some of them are the offspring of an open rupture and a violent contest with friends and neighbors, when the spirit of religion was mingled with personal animosity. Some have more calmly withdrawn from the places in which they were brought up, where they had long silently listened to doctrines which they disbelieved, and had sat for peace sake among religionists with whom they had no sympathy. They have always been in opposition to the minister and to the current theology of the place; consequently, they have received into their souls none of those wholesome influences which come from early attachment to the institutions of the Gospel, and are very likely to be void of that deep sense of their worth and necessity, which leads men to struggle for them and maintain them, at any cost and at some sacrifices.

And, next, in all our congregations, and throughout every part of the country, there is a class of men who have attached themselves to us simply because we are not orthodox; men, who dislike Calvinism, but like nothing else; who think religion a good thing, that ought to be supported, and are glad to find some form which they can support different

from that which they have been taught heartily to hate. They are anti-calvinists, anti-orthodox, anti-zealots, anti-everything severe and urgent in religion. They will not forsake it, because to do so would put them out of good society ; indeed, they are not without a vague traditional respect for it. They maintain a pew in the church, for the same reason that the worldly-minded merchant asks his minister to say grace when he has company to dine. It is decent and is expected of him. Such men are found among the loose hangers on of every sect. A sect in the church militant is made up like an army going forth to war. There is the select body of the wise and hearty, who enter zealously into the merits of the cause, and give themselves to it soul and body. There is the larger number of considerate and faithful adherents, bound to it unflinchingly, but who are merely followers of the opinions of their betters, and take on themselves none of the responsibility of judging the merits of the case, or deciding on the propriety of the measures. There is still another class, who care little about the matter, who are in this army merely because it so happened, but are no more interested in its movements or success, than as they increase or diminish their own personal comforts. And lastly, there are the

loose retainers of the camp, now here, now there, now nowhere, who like the protection of the flag and swell the numbers of the march, but who own no allegiance, perform no service, and are but a pestilent hindrance to those who are earnest in the cause. Such men, I say, are hanging about the skirts of every sect, — they hang about ours ; would to God we could make good Christians of them ! they are far enough from it now.

There are others, too, far enough from being good christians ; forward and respectable men, who, for worldly reasons merely, whether of public good or of personal credit, take a zealous part in the secular concerns of the congregation, and identify all its interests with their own character, — very earnestly devoted to a cause to which they bring disrepute by their own characters, — sincerely wishing to strengthen the hand of religion, and by the very act calling forth the sneers of the ungodly and encouraging the ribaldry of the vain. Would to God, that such men would either leave the ark of the Lord to itself, or purify themselves before they touch it !

It is sometimes made occasion of reproach, that such men are found to attach themselves to our societies. But very unreasonably, for, as I said, they are to be found attached to

every sect, — every sect numbers among its followers many merely nominal christians, and many worldly irreligious men. The agitations of the times may have cast a larger proportion of these into our ranks than into those of the more popular sects. If so, it is precisely what has always happened and must happen in regard to those denominations which distinguish themselves in the contest for liberty. It is precisely what took place at the Reformation. At that time, the Reformed church, struggling for liberty, was obnoxious to this same reproach, and was accused as tauntingly of protecting the lax and irreligious, as the Unitarian church now. Any reform which is urged on the principle of greater freedom of mind, will be open to the same accusation ; for it will be favored by many worthless men who are strenuous advocates for *liberty*, but care nothing for virtue. At the beginning of the Reformation in England, it was a common saying, “ The further from Rome, the nearer to God ; ” and under shelter of this, multitudes were glad to go as far as possible from the good things of Rome, no less than from the evil. Bishop Burnet tells us respecting those days, that “ the irregular and immoral lives of many of the professors of the Gospel, gave their enemies great advantage to say, that they ran

away from confession, penance, fasting and prayers, only that they might be under no restraint, but indulge themselves in a licentious and dissolute course of life." It is to be expected that irregular and licentious men should thus take advantage of the state of the times ; but their doing so should create no prejudice against the cause itself. It is, however, one of the circumstances to be taken into solemn consideration in our judgment respecting the position which we occupy, and the duties which are imposed upon us.

Such is a cursory view of the condition in which we stand at the close of the struggle, which has made us a distinct denomination among the churches of our land. Thus do we stand before the world, just three centuries after the beginning of the Reformation, at the moment when we have been striving to do our share toward carrying its great principles into complete effect.

It is a moment for pausing to look around us, a crisis of unspeakable interest. It is now to be tried and known what are the power and worth of the principles for which we have been contending. It is to be seen whether we are willing to ADORN the doctrine we have secured to ourselves ; whether we can LIVE for our faith, as well as fight for it ; whether we



will struggle as hard for the *character*, as we have done for the *name*, of christians. It is impossible that the present state of things should not powerfully affect the all-important questions of personal religion, and call for strenuous exertions of duty on those who are thus subjected to a peculiar responsibility.

Character is in a great measure the offspring of circumstances. The action and results of principles are greatly modified by circumstances. In order to employ principles in such a manner as to secure their intended results, we must ascertain the nature and influence of the circumstances which affect their action. The men who, in one age of the world, show themselves under a certain aspect because necessarily moulded by the pressure of the age, would become of a wholly different stamp if subjected to the impressions of a later period; and the principles, whose action, being opposed by or combined with that of a certain state of society, leads to unhappy results, might become, in another state of society, the spring of all that is generous and great. Accordingly it has been remarked, that the Puritan character, though such as could be formed only beneath christian influences, is yet a character which will never appear again upon earth, because the very peculiar circumstances

of that astonishing period can never be precisely repeated. Every period has its own circumstances modifying in some way the operation of universal principles, and thus producing a character of its own; every subdivision or subordinate circle in society modifies it still farther, and produces another variety of the general character.

He that is wise, seeks to ascertain what are these circumstances, and to use them or thwart them in such manner as shall bring about the best result on his own character. Every wise community will do the same.

Let us look at the Unitarian community, with this reference to the circumstances in which it is placed. What has it assumed as the universal principles of truth and duty, and how is their practical operation affected by the posture of the times, and what are the peculiar obligations thence resulting? I could not answer these questions in a volume; in this pamphlet I only pretend to hint at an answer.

In respect to *principles*, what is most worthy of observation seems to me this:—it professes to have adopted as the universal principles of truth and duty, those fundamental everlasting principles, which are received by all christians as the basis and substance of

their faith, and which comprise the essence of all religion, morality and philosophy. The process by which these principles are arrived at, is very simple. It has, in following out the doctrines of the great Lutheran Reform, stricken off from its list of theological articles those which were *peculiar* to the Romish church, and had made that church distinctively what it was ; — then, it removed those which formed the *peculiarities* of the Lutheran and the Calvinistic bodies ; then it set aside those which were peculiar to the church of England and the kirk of Scotland ; and, in a word, it excluded whatever, in any one narrow body of believers, formed *the distinctive badge of that body*, — Moravian, Methodist, Baptist, Swedenborgian, &c ; — reserving to itself whatever, by being found in each, was proved to be common in all. All that illustrious and unquestionable truth, which is so divine, so essential, so undeniable, that no one of those numerous companies of the holy and good has been led by any philosophy or interest to withhold assent from it ; all that glorious and comforting doctrine, which brings to consent and sympathy the purified spirits of our Paschals, Leightons, Doddridges, Wesleys, Cappel, and Penns, — this, separated from all accompanying admixtures, is that truth which the Unita-

rian community professes to receive as the binding, authoritative, guide to the human soul. This is that to which the study of the scriptures, unbiassed by the authority of ages or of churches, naturally conducts. It places those who receive it at once in harmony with all the diversities of the church as respects the essentials of religion, and in contrast to them as regards the non-essentials. As if the sacred metal of truth having been coined up for current use by the different christian peoples with various proportions and qualities of alloy, this people had proposed to separate from it and cast away those meaner ingredients, and receive in circulation none but the original and unadulterated.

This is the IDEA. This is what they profess to desire, and to aim after. This is the image of full attainment, the mark of the high calling in christian doctrine, which is set up before us. Not that it has ever been reached; not that in any community among us this great perfection has been realized. Far from it. It is the glorious aim of many, but probably the actual attainment of none. And when we consider how glorious it is, and what incitements we have to strive after it, it is mortifying and humbling to observe how far short of it even they fall, who have the clearest perception of its grandeur and excellence.

Indeed is it not too true, that the very process of mind through which this pure faith is to be sought and attained, — the process of comparing and discussing, and discriminating, and sifting, — is in some respects unfavorable to a due appreciation of its worth when attained? For it is the unhappy consequence of controversy to exaggerate the importance of the disputed doctrines; to draw to them a disproportionate attention, to give to them an undue prominence; and to dismiss from their proper place in the thoughts, those which ought to be the predominating and regulating truths. There is no doubt that it has so happened in the case before us. Strongly as men have been persuaded that the *common* and not the *disputed* truths are of essential and vital moment, yet as it is the *disputed* which have necessarily been kept prominent during the long discussion, the feelings have been too much kept hovering about them, and prevented from fervently dwelling on the verities of acknowledged supremacy. Thus it is easy to see how the habit may arise of rejoicing with ardent sincerity in the possession of this light, and yet devoting more thought to what is undoubtedly of inferior moment.

Herein, I must remark by the way, is one of the infelicities under which this particular

controversy has laid, beyond most of those which have agitated the christian world. It has turned upon points of philological interpretation and metaphysical discrimination, which, however they may satisfy the head, have little in them to excite the fervors of the heart ; and yet, being connected with all those holiest words and ideas about which the heart ought to have its deepest fervors, has directly tended to check and chill its natural warmth. Not so was it in some of the other remarkable contests of the church ; not such the points for which Methodism contended, and the Quietists and Quakers suffered. They fell on other days and were thrown into other channels of thought, which did less to separate the subjects of their debate from those of their rightful affection ; and in this were they more happy than we. I do not say it to excuse our remissness ; God forbid ! but to point out one unhappy circumstance of the times, to the hurtful influence of which we ought to be keenly alive.

To return then to the point from which I may seem to have been departing ; — never was it given to a company of believers to be united by constitution or bond so dignified and admirable as this, when understood according to its true idea. It is the naked heart, the

inmost core of christian truth, separated from every addition with which human ignorance, error, ambition, or superstition had connected it. A famous sect of philosophers there anciently was, who thought to arrive at true wisdom by selecting from all the schools what seemed truest in each, and uniting them in a new system. But the purpose of these modern Eclectics is better still, — to reject what is peculiar to each school, and retain that radical and seminal central truth, which Christ proclaimed from heaven; — to bow to no human wisdom, be led by no finite will, governed by no fallible authority, — but to be free, absolutely and unreservedly, from all constraint upon thought, inquiry, conscience, faith, except the constraint of the revealed Word, and the willing allegiance of the conscientious mind. It is impossible for imagination to conceive a more sublime position for man or angel, in earth or heaven, than this,—that of a spirit erect and independent, owning no control but that of the Being which made it, and to Him and his will surrendered without reserve.

This is the result to which the sublime principles of the Reformation conduct. Those principles insist on freedom of thought, liberty of conscience, the right of private judgment, independence of human control, in the

strictest sense. They permit and require every man to inquire of the scriptures and decide for himself ; — with unqualified submission to God, with absolute independence of man. That denomination has most consistently adhered to them, which has thrown away every creed but the Bible, and unseated every judge but Christ.

If I understand the subject aright, this is what Unitarianism claims to have done. What a responsibility does it imply ! What honesty of mind, what singleness, directness and steadfastness of will, what resolute allegiance to conscience and God, does it demand of its disciples ! It might be excusable for other men to inquire dilatorily for truth, and with an indolent foot follow the path of their convictions ; for they have cast a portion of their responsibility upon others, and professedly learn much from human teachers. But for those who claim to be free from the interference of every human mind, to plant their faith and risk their salvation on the word of God alone, — they are guilty of most inexcusable madness, if they stop short at any secondary knowledge, if they do not draw industriously from that infinite fountain, — if they be not as absolutely subjected to God as they are freed from man. For the object of their liberty is not,



that they may follow wildly their own momentary and undisciplined impulses, — that they may take up and lay down at pleasure the thoughts and pursuits which expediency may suggest. They are set free from the control of man, as the planets are, that they may the more exactly and blissfully observe the true orbit appointed by their Maker ; made free by the truth, that they may obey the truth, by the truth be sanctified, and thus arrive at that only honor which a rational soul should desire, or in which it can find its well-being.

Has any one fully realized this great idea in his own mind and history ? Is there any one who has been thus gloriously true to his trust ? Let us believe that there have been many such. We think that we have known them, — some, shining out illustriously to brighten and shame the world — some, in the humblest retirements of life, to call forth the admiration and eulogy of the few who see them there, and who marvel that God should not have placed them on high among men. Let us hope that there are many beyond what is supposed, who have arrived at this singular attainment. But does it characterize any *community* ? Do we see the Community, which bears upon its very front the token of this holy and resolute independence, which is

imbued throughout with this heavenward and indefeasible allegiance to conscience, unswayed by human opinion, reputation and fashion, consecrated to duty, and sacrificing to duty all selfish and worldly ends? Do we see the Community, which has so thrown off the dominion of man, that it is led neither in its opinions nor its practices by the fluctuating standard of the popular breath, but is palpably subject to the supreme and unbending law of God? I think not. Liberty of thought and opinion is strenuously proclaimed; in this proud land it has become almost a wearisome cant; our speeches and journals, religious and political, are made nauseous by the vapid and vain-glorious reiteration. But does it after all, *characterize any community among us?* Is there any one to which a qualified observer shall point, and say, *There*, opinion is free? On the contrary, is it not a fact, a sad and deplorable fact, that in no land on this earth is the mind more fettered than it is here? that here what we call Public Opinion has set up a despotism, such as exists no where else? Public Opinion — a tyrant, sitting in the dark, wrapt up in mystification and vague terrors of obscurity; deriving power no one knows from whom; like an Asian monarch, unapproachable, unimpeachable, undethronable, perhaps

illegitimate, — but irresistible in its power to quell thought, to repress action, to silence conviction, — and bringing the timid perpetually under an unworthy bondage of mean fear to some impostor opinion, some noisy judgment which gets astride on the popular breath for a day, and controls, through the lips of impudent folly, the speech and actions of the wise.

From this influence and rule, from this bondage to opinion, no community, as such, is free, though doubtless individuals are. But your community, Brethren, based on the principles which you profess, is bound to be so. Each for himself in faith; each for all in action; men to be loved and served, but not to be followed or obeyed; no master but Christ, no Father but God; — these are your maxims. Man seems something more than human when these principles are stated; — but he becomes something less, if, professing them in form, he falsify them in fact.

As I am writing this, my eye is caught by the motto which stands upon the cover of one of your periodical journals. “*Liberty, Holiness, Love.*” It seems to have been assumed as descriptive of the objects which you are to keep in view, and the character which you are to form. They are well chosen words. *They constitute a beautiful and harmonious*

trio, whose blended hues, whose vigorous co-action, delineate and describe what the Christian Church should be, what the Christian Truth should produce. Is it not the purpose of the truth to "make free;" and where the spirit of the Lord is, is there not Liberty? Is it not the province of the truth to "sanctify?" And doth it not "work by love?" Every one that hath been wrought upon by its power, *knows* that such are its effects. And where it hath brought out the church from its more than Egyptian bondage to earth and sense and man, from the degrading slavery of sin into the liberty of the sons of God; where it hath raised it up by its celestial energy, to a thorough Holiness;—and filled it with that love to God and men, which is the substance of religion on earth, and the essential spirit of heaven; then hath it not done its errand, hath it not accomplished its mission? It augurs well therefore for any church or body of men, that it will take this for its watchword, and hang it out as an ensign to rally by in the face of the world. It describes what ought to be the spirit of the christian world. God grant it may prove to be your spirit!

But it must not only be hung out from your walls, or blazoned on your armor, or written on the foreheads of your priests. It

must be engraven on the living tablets of your hearts. It must be a deeply felt sentiment of your inmost souls. It must be the earnest voice of your resolute spirits, day and night, continually prompting to thoughts, words, deeds, that correspond. It must be the inwrought character of your private lives, and the evident character of your churches, as well as the motto of your books.

Liberty, as I have already said, you have mostly achieved and you jealously prize. But what if some should esteem it a license from holiness, and a commission to hate whom they please? The thing is not impossible; and I say, see to it, that no one among you allow in himself, nor encourage in another, this lamentable self-deception. You had better be suffering all the horrors of the middle passage, without hope of redemption or end, than walk abroad in the semblance of free men, and yet be slaves to selfishness and lust. Your religion has been bestowed on you, that you might do therewith a great work of moral advancement for yourselves and for your fellow-men. Jesus Christ hath smitten off your chains, that you may go and do that work unhindered. And now, to boast of your light, your privileges, your deliverance from superstition and priestcraft, while you live a corrupt and selfish life,

is but proving yourselves the fit subjects for a heavier bondage, and the discipline of a more mortifying restraint.

What therefore, I ask, are you doing in this day of your privilege? What sort of men is it that you are permitting yourselves to be? What sort of churches of the Lord Jesus are you setting up in the world? Now that you have been set apart from the body of the believing world, and made to stand forth by yourselves as representatives of the Gospel, it is as if a message from the Lord had come to you, and bid you inquire and know what sort of representatives you are.

Cast a scrutinizing glance, — not cursory, not partial, — look faithfully, look deep, — *for if ye will judge yourselves ye shall not be judged*, — upon all the multiform congregations among you, — make the charitable allowance, which you may, which you ought, for the humors of the time, and for the untoward influences of a broken age; — think justly on the countervailing advantages by which, in some portions of your community, you are signalized; — survey your whole land, from Dan to Beersheba, from your Jerusalem to the desert and the sea; — ponder soberly the condition in which you find it; — penetrate intently and profoundly, into your own heart, try your own

character, and search out and note down your own springs of action and purposes of existence ; — and then say, — Is the state of religion what it should be among such a people ? have christian faith and immortal truth that commanding influence which they should have ? Is this people marked by a scrupulousness and high-minded conscientiousness, by an all controlling regard to the divine will, by eager, hearty, and self-denying activity in behalf of other men ? Is the spirit of the Gospel their spirit, and the life of Jesus their pattern, and do they show themselves as devotedly resolved to be free from selfishness and wrong, as to be free from creeds and human authority ?

I feel that this would be a trying inquisition. No church on the face of the earth ever did or could abide it without shrinking and shame. Neither can that to which I put it now. It touches to the quick. It reveals fearful deficiencies. Yet it must be made ; and wo to the man or the body of men, that would refuse to look at it honestly, and that would shun the investigation, for the sake of present peace. Let every man open his eyes. If there be error, let him see it. If there be wrong, let him acknowledge it. If there be danger, let him not sleep over it, but manfully *rise up, proclaim it, and begin the war against*

it. Nothing is so fatal as an unwillingness to know ourselves. Nothing so shameful as voluntarily to be ignorant of ourselves. Let us know the worst ; we shall then be prepared for the worst. Let us know the truth ; we shall then not perish by falsehood and delusion.

I do not pursue these inquiries. They belong to the decision of a higher tribunal, whose awful judgment it is not for man to anticipate. Yet we do know, — for God has not concealed it from us, — on what grounds that judgment will proceed, and we cannot affect to be ignorant of the grounds on which our own opinion should be made up. We know what character God requires of men and of nations ; we understand perfectly what manner of religion that is, which satisfies the description of the New Testament. And no man is so stupid, that he shall not be able to say, if he will, whether that religion rules his own heart, and pervades the society in which he moves. It is a religion, which may be described in a few strong words better than in volumes. It is a religion, not of passion, not of forms, not of profession, not of decencies, not of words, not of fancy. It is not reverie, nor speculation, nor political craft, nor good policy. It is a stern, inflexible principle of Truth and Duty, which swerves not from



right and has no patience with wrong ; — an unblenching Faith in God, which sees and trusts his hand in everything, and trusts no second cause, independently of Him ; — and a philanthropic purpose to do good to men, which no coldness, nor ingratitude, nor scorn of the worldly and prudent can check or abate. It is the conscientious devotion of the affections and the life to the service of God and man, as that which alone becomes a being whose existence is never to end. This is the religion which heavenly truth produces. Does it act on some individual ? It makes him severely yet cheerfully faithful to every relation and trust, not because he is a citizen of earth, but because he has an immortal nature. Or on a community ? It makes it full of righteousness and peace, where God is more regarded than man, and therefore man is made more blessed than elsewhere because he is God's child.

This is the religion, which, for our own sake, for the world's sake, we must labor to establish, and without which our wisdom is but folly and our zeal but idle breath. We may demonstrate the sublimest theories, may proclaim the soundest faith, may utter the voice of angels ; but if it do not come to this result, it is all but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And this result can only spring from

*the vigorous action of the truth, through the medium of its established institutions.*

At no period of the world was it ever more important to insist on the necessity of thus sustaining the Institutions of the Gospel. Never were they more endangered, or their holy influences more put in jeopardy, than by the hazardous experiments, and rash and worldly confidence, and various divisions, of these unsettled and broken times. The agitations of society have disturbed the foundations and weakened the strength of the churches in all parts of the land, and threatened some of them even with extinction. In many humble and impoverished parishes, numbers are few, means are small, and the Gospel is costly. It is an alarming problem yet to be solved, what shall be done to keep alive the fire on those lesser altars ; and now that the law has forsaken the church door in this as well as in the other States, a new era has arrived, when the wise must contrive how the Gospel shall be supported among the thinly scattered and feeble, so that its light shall continue to burn, and our children of the coming generations shall be born to the enjoyment of christian worship. Let those who are able, devise ; let the favored and wealthy be ready to contribute ; let all ponder and pray ; — and God for-

bid, that, through our remissness, one cottage shall remain upon our blessed fields, whose inmates are beyond the reach of the Sabbath-bell and the pulpit exhortation. There are some who do not feel this aright; — some, blessed by God with property as well as liberty, who fancy that both are for themselves only, and who meanly withdraw from the support of his worship. There are congregations made up, in considerable part, of men who are more willing to live without the preaching of the Word, than to tax themselves so much for the means of salvation as they do for sugar in their tea, or for needless ornaments on the dress of their daughters. This is a crying enormity. No one who values religion, can refuse the little sacrifice which would be necessary for its support. Better give up half the luxuries of civilized life, than suffer the public means of religion to decay. Those luxuries may be spared, and no suffering will ensue. But if religious institutions cease, barbarism and profaneness will come over the land, and the happy charities of life perish. And certainly, in these days of abundance and growing ease, — when persecution is known but in name, and suffering for Christ's sake is a thing only of history, — it is an inconceivable meanness to refuse the little self-denial which would ena-

ble one to double the former parish-tax, and, instead of this, to pay over to the dancing master or the milliner, the few dollars which might ensure the preaching of the Gospel.

The avarice and selfishness of the nominal, the worldly, the indifferent, and the unbelieving, and the subdivisions of sectarian zeal which multiply churches by dividing worshipers, have seriously affected the regular means of supporting religious institutions. But what then? They must none the less, — rather the more, — be supported; and it presents a fresh opportunity to the faithful to evince their attachment to the truth by some extra effort in its behalf. Many have so regarded it, and have met the emergency with alacrity, have exhibited the most praiseworthy readiness, and poured out bountifully to satisfy the demands of the times. Let them receive a hearty tribute of applause for their faithful work. But let a decided and open expression of disapprobation and contempt be awarded to those selfish worldlings, who count their shillings more dear than instruction, and can afford themselves any luxury but that of going to church. Let a severer rebuke await those arrogant and despicable impostors, (of whom it is said there are some, though surely they must be few,) who make a boast of their enlightenment, and

presume to take on their lips the advocacy of liberal truth, and yet close their hearts against all appeals for aid in spreading and sustaining the light they glory in. Truly, the light of such men is but darkness, — darkness that may be felt. They are strangers to the truth which they profess to know ; and, loud as they talk, if they could have their way, it would cease in another generation to shine upon the world.

It is not easy to use a gentler word in reference to those, who, with the same confidence in their own superior light, yet absent themselves one half the time from the worship which they support. These are mostly your luxurious citizens, your genteel religionists, who go to church for examples' sake, and because religion is an excellent thing for the poor ; who kneel on cushions of down and confess their sins in all attitudes of languor and grace ; — great admirers of beautiful style and poetical imagery ; — who divide their religious feelings between the sermon of the morning, and the dinner of the noonday, and the conversation or slumbers of the afternoon. This race of accommodating christians is principally the growth of larger towns, and may be found in all our cities patronising the fashionable church, — no matter what the denomination

may chance to be. It flourishes well among those whose weeks are given to amusement. It exhibits its striking sense of the contrast which should exist between religion and the world, by the crowded condition of its cotillion rooms, and the emptiness of its churches. Doubtless it would be too much to expect of those who are wearied out with the pleasures of the week, that they should have spirit or strength to worship God as much on Sunday as common people who have no such weighty cares ; it would be unreasonable to require them in the afternoon to attend church, when they can hardly find time to get through their courses and drink their wine. In every great city, there are a few congregations, composed of these privileged persons, these lights of the world, these patterns and benefactors of society, who have made such advancement in religion, that it is wholly unnecessary for them to worship God on Sunday afternoon, and their ministers have the opportunity of looking without interruption directly upon the rich caparisons of their elegant pews. They would probably not think it perfectly fair that he also should leave the church, and disappoint the few who venture to do so vulgar a thing as keep him countenance in the worship of God ; he must adhere to the fashion of preaching all day, just

as much as they to their fashion of leaving him to preach alone.

It unfortunately happens, that this practice, selfish and indecent as it is, and inconsistent with all right views of the object of public worship, is yet, — alas, for the corrupting power of thoughtless fashion ! — easily embraced by many who not only mean well in general, but who rightfully make some pretensions to religion. *But in vain will you look to see religion flourish where this vice is prevalent.* In vain will you expect that those will do much or care much for its purity and influence, who manifest so little interest in its institutions, — who statedly, purposely, habitually, allow themselves in that practice, which, if general, would be the overthrow of public religious observances. Let it be especially noted, — as what concerns especially the topics before us, — that in these days of progressive reform, when in religion, as in all things else, old customs cease to be revered, and a departure from them is thought to be *of course* an improvement, — when, ‘liberty’ being the watch-word, the multitude are easily made to fancy that constancy is bondage, and to suppose that they advance into light just in proportion as they recede from their fathers or their old fashioned neighbors, — under such circumstances, it is neces-



sary that special effort be made to retain a sober reverence for the house of God and his worship; that, in fact, uncommon pains be taken in every possible way to strengthen the habit of regarding them as sacred and divine. We are lost, — I speak with solemn deliberation, — we are lost, and our power to benefit and advance great principles is gone, whenever we shall encourage or permit the public means of religion to be slighted. And no more mistaken or false friend to the cause of human liberty and improvement can be found, than he, whose conduct in this respect makes men think that he personally feels no interest in it, and whose example directly tends but to quench that interest in others. The cause of Episcopacy never was much promoted by those splendid buildings in which the boasted liturgy is read every Sunday afternoon to empty seats. Methodism never spread itself by the agency of men whose hearts allowed them to prefer a dinner to a sermon. It was not such men that introduced, or helped to introduce, the Gospel, or started the Reformation; and we may depend upon it, that those will have no share in the completion of that glorious Reformation, however they may boast, who cast personal slight on the worship and preaching by which it is to be brought about.



I am aware that all this applies to but a small class; but it serves none the less to illustrate my positions, and it may indirectly give admonition to others. I am aware also, that all this relates but to the *means* of religion; but without the means, who will venture to guaranty the *end*? There are, I know, a few mystical, speculative men, who are possessed with the fancy that not themselves only, but that the world, has outgrown these leading-strings; who make light of all instrumental help; and who thus, — with a good, but most mistaken intent, — virtually join the scoffer in sapping the foundations of religion. It is enough to give a passing word to this. It is the error and sickness of the times, threatening serious disasters; for where one thoughtful and safe man lays aside this wholesome attachment to institutions, instruments, and helps, weaker men will do it in multitudes, and will shelter their indolence, worldliness, and selfishness, like their more enlightened brethren, beneath the plea of a spirituality which needs not the nourishment of these beggarly elements. It is one of the perils of the times. Let the strong watchmen be awake to it. Let them not cease day nor night to cry out against it with a loud and alarming cry. Let them suffer none to sleep under the fatal notion that

religion will grow up of itself in their hearts, without the culture which God and nature have ordained ; or that a great truth will prevail because it is great, without any care to guard and enforce it. Let them pour scorn on these puerile and superficial conceits. Let them strangle this idle and mischievous folly. Let them silence those who profanely pretend a special trust in God and his ways, while in practice they condemn his purposes and neglect the way of his commandment. If this great work for the perfection of christianity and of men is to be done, it must be done by men, putting in operation the necessary means. If you do not take your share in it, — no matter what your plea, — you will share none of the honor promised to those who do it, — you will taste the bitter shame ordained for those who hinder it. If you fancy yourself already too enlightened to require the further aid of times and ordinances, the greater cause for using and honoring them, that you may bring others to the same advanced state. If you are sure that the great cause is in triumphant progress, the greater the reason that you should not hold back, but, if you love it, should “pursue the triumph and partake the gale.” If you think it by any thing encumbered, hindered, thwarted, the greater the cause that you should be awake

and active, — removing obstacles, encouraging friends, and swelling the tide of men and measures which is to sweep away the impediments of the truth.

It will be said by some, “ Let the people be truly interested in religion, and they will both support and attend its institutions. Make them religious, — that is what you have to do ; until then, you in vain call for their contributions, or expect them to be present in the church.” Undoubtedly, this would be a remedy for all backwardness. The truly devoted will spare neither their money nor their time, But how are men to *become* thus devoted ? Are we to use no means to render them so, until they are already such ? Are we to be told that there is no motive to bring men within christian influences, short of that absorbing religious feeling, which would show that the work is already nearly done ? Certainly not ; there are other motives, powerful motives. It as much pertains to good citizenship as to piety, to take care that public worship be supported ; and multitudes of those, who are at present indifferent and worldly, think of it reverently and well, and intend by and by to be sanctified by it. All these are to be entreated to perceive their obligations ; they are to be called on as patriots and friends of social

order and peace, to prevent the downfall of these powerful seminaries of moral instruction. But I have more particularly in view another class, — those, already referred to, who count themselves the subjects of a glorious emancipation, the participators of a great light, and who freely use words of self-congratulation. They are, or profess to be, keenly alive to a sense of mental degradation, and are perfectly aware of the great privilege they enjoy in the light and liberty of the present era. They are very honestly ready to thank God that they are not as other men, — members of churches, which fetter them by human confessions and bind them to make no advance in their apprehensions of spiritual truth. Now is it decent for such men, — who not only enjoy great privileges, but show that they are aware of it, — is it decent for them to withdraw their support from the institutions which guaranty their peculiar advantages? Is it consistent or becoming in them to forsake the churches, which they assert to resound with the purest doctrine? to doom to poverty the preachers, whom they believe to be the most enlightened apostles of God's word, and to discourage the eloquent asserters of the most important views which have dawned upon the earth? I address these questions to a *select*

*class*, which it is mortifying to say has an existence, but which, God be praised ! is as small as it is arrogant and false. I address their sense of shame, their sense of dignity, their love of consistency, their magnanimity, their intelligence, their hope of immortality, their faith in a future reckoning.

If all who profess to honor religion were religious men, there would indeed be no call for expostulation or entreaty, on behalf of religion. But alas, the inconsistency of believers with their profession, is an evil as old and as notorious as the existence of the church itself. The solemn and indignant questions of Paul in his second chapter to the Romans, have been equally applicable to multitudes in every age since ; and it is more a matter of grief than astonishment, that they still apply to many of our own day. The increase of light is with them rather a cause for glorying, than a call to duty. They with great complacency rest in their light, and make their boast in God, and know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, and yet through unfaithfulness to their light, they dishonor God. They live respectable lives of worldly decorum, but have no spirituality of affection, no desire for excellence beyond the ordinary mark, no conception of anything more pure and dis-

interested than the average of decent society has presented to their view. Their standard is low, their tastes sensual, their principle inactive, their wisdom earthly and sensual, though not perhaps devilish. They live decently, but only for themselves and for this world. They would be very sorry to be accounted other than friends of religion, but they would be greatly ashamed to be pointed out as pious men. They are proud of the dignity of their intellectual nature, and do not doubt the immortality of their souls; but nothing is further from their intention or desire, than to occupy their minds now with the subjects which they suppose are to occupy their future immortality.

There is a lamentable deficiency in our practical apprehension of what are the requisitions of our religion. We do not see, feel, realize, the extent and strictness of its obligations. With all our getting, we have not got a spiritual understanding of its admirable and glorious purpose. We are yet in the alphabet of christian attainment; we are of the earth, earthy. Who is there, that in his best hours of serious contemplation, has not been made deeply to deplore this? Let me not be met with the cry that there is such a thing as being righteous over-much; nor let the old saying be turned against me, 'Physician, heal thyself, —prac-



tise, instead of preaching.' No one has such a claim to be heard in denouncing an evil, as he who can tell of it from personal experience ; no man's warning is so good as his who can show how himself and his friends are suffering. There is a great dislike to austerity, a great dread of puritanism, a horror of cant and fanaticism and superstition ; and one cannot recommend a stricter devotion, or a more scrupulous morality, than the ordinary customs of the world make requisite, without the risk of being branded by the more worldly as an enthusiast or a hypocrite, and being told by many of the more serious, ' that it is too late in the day, that this preciseness and scrupulosity were well enough formerly, but that the spirit of the times forbids it now ; *nous avons changé tout cela* ; it is vain to think of carrying men back to modes of thought which are long obsolete, and to habits of devout observance which savor more of the cloister than of the world.'

Let us admit the changes which have taken place, and which render it requisite to abandon modes of operation and address and observance, which are no longer adapted to accomplish their design. But human nature has not changed ; the christian religion has not changed ; the institutions of God have not

changed ; — there may be a diversity of operations, but there is the same God who speaks, the same truth for the instrument, the same nature to be wrought upon. The requisitions of that God are as rigidly conformable to the eternal and uncompromising law of right, as they ever were ; the path of sentiment and life to which truth would lead, is no whit less strait and direct ; the nature to be perfected, is accessible to the same and to no different principles and motives, and is to be moulded into the same character. Surely, that the christian character is to be inferior in moral elevation, that it is to have less of spirituality and self-consecration to principle, less of the Christlike, and the Godlike, than in other days, will not be pretended. What it was in the days of Jesus, such it is now ; such as it showed itself in his example, such it must be in the lives of his followers, at the present time. To make it less disinterested, less unworldly, less scrupulously averse from all contamination of impurity and all suspicion of wrong, would be to make it another thing than the christian character. To make it more compatible with a heart devoted to ambition and gain, with a life of thoughtlessness, frivolity and uselessness, —to make it synonymous with



self-interest, and the decent external proprieties of civilized life, — would be to change its definition from that which its master gave to it. To make it of so pliable a texture, of so flexible and complying a disposition, that it shall be consistent with any degree of selfishness and worldliness which does not destroy a man's reputation; with any devotedness to luxury and folly, or any modes or forms of business which are not discreditable; with any absorption in useless fancies, indolent indulgencies, or money-making cares, which are not absolutely injurious to society; or, in a word, with all and any character of heart and life, which does not offend against human law, or honor, or fashion; — is to make it a convenient tool for human depravity, instead of an infallible guide to celestial purity. And yet, we are perfectly aware, that there are men of all these sorts of characters, who deem their lives very sufficiently religious; and who are indignant against the austerity and uncharitableness of any definition of the christian life, which would put in jeopardy their empty self-complacency.

There must be some standard; — and it cannot require to be proved, that it must be a peculiar one, — a high one, — an inflexible one; — a standard, which will not vary to accommodate itself to different states of soci-

ety, or different dispositions of individuals; but which, like him who established it, is the same yesterday, today, and forever; — making the true disciple of the first century, the same, in all essential and characteristic features, with the consistent christian of the middle ages and these latter days; in things indifferent granting a privilege to human imperfection; but, in the vital spirit, the essential elements, the absolute characteristics, demanding imperatively an absolute and undeviating conformity.

The great danger is that of admitting too lax a standard. The world is always encroaching upon it, and the weakness of the human heart gives way. It may be that the figure is too strong, which represents the christian character as a fire burning from out of the ocean, which can exist in the midst of so contrary an element only by perpetual miracle; but certainly there are counteracting impulses, principles, and opinions in the world, which render a perpetual effort necessary on the part of the christian to sustain the liveliness and purity of his faith; there are influences from society, from example, from without and from within, which tend constantly to secularise his feelings, to bring down the tone of his affections and convictions, to dull his susceptibility to truth and purity. The crying danger is that of admit-

ting too low a standard. Many a man, — who has learned what human virtue should be from the study of the scriptures and devout communion with God, and who, in the private contemplations of his early days, has suffered his imagination to draw pictures of the good people whom he was hereafter to meet in the world, — has found, on entering life, that his notions were far above the actual standard of good men, that his idea of the prevalent religion was too beautiful for the christianity of christians, was an image of something not to be seen in the world ; he has found them shaking their heads at him with a wise and meaning smile, as they informed him that his notions of goodness were impracticable, that they would do for the closet, but not for those who know the world and must live among men. At first he is disappointed, shocked and mortified ; but he gradually becomes accustomed to so lamentable a state of things, acquiesces in it as unavoidable, and comes by and by to have his enthusiasm as thoroughly cooled, and his ardor for perfect goodness as completely turned into discreet caution, and his charity as carefully guarded by selfishness, as the older men about him.

It has been the disgrace of christians, that they have not stood out against this worldly

tendency, and kept themselves up to their own temperature in spite of the cold atmosphere of society. If their souls had imbibed the full vitality of their religion, if they had been filled with the spirit of its life, they would have found in themselves the power of resistance, just as they find it in their bodies. The mysterious principle of organic life imparts to the body a sustaining energy, which keeps the vital heat invariably the same ; — though all around be chill, it remains unaltered ; and Providence has afforded means of aiding it to preserve this temperature which protects it from distraction. When *the soul truly lives*, it possesses a similar power of resistance to external influence. The world may operate upon it, the moral atmosphere of society may close around it with its deadliest influences ; — but it has the power of resistance, it may retain its own standard ; and God, by his word and spirit, has made provision of means by which, in any extremity of exposure, it may be completely protected. If men will not use those means, if they will not clothe themselves in the protecting dress of watchfulness and prayer, they will lose in the world the warmth of their devotional natures, and cease to enjoy the full health of the immortal soul. It is the disgrace of christians that it

has so often been the case with them. Some, many, have wrapt themselves in their principles of holiness, and refused to give place for a moment to earthly solicitation or example, and thus have exhibited illustrious instances of the beauty and excellence of christianity. But alas, others, too many, have conformed themselves to the world, — they have dreaded to be singular, — they have been ashamed to be better than others, — and they have thus lost both the influence with others and the peace within themselves, which they might and ought to have possessed. Hence it is that society is not more thoroughly christianized. The friends of christianity have gone to the world, instead of insisting that the world should come to them. They have weakly given way. They have failed of presenting that dignified and resolute adherence to the convictions of conscience, that unhesitating, immovable devotedness to grand and immortal principles, which their infinite importance deserves. Nothing less than such devotedness could persuade a worldly-minded man, that they actually believed in their reality and eternity. How could he be persuaded, that those men loved supremely a better and immortal life, who were as eager and as unprincipled as others in the struggles of this? How could religion gain

ground in the world, when advocated by men who were constantly qualifying and modifying the requisitions of their faith, to suit a sensual and worldly taste, and accommodate their own temporal interests ?

There is no more serious mistake than the idea of promoting the interests of religion by diminishing its strictness, and thus bribing the favor of the world. The world is not to be so bribed. It sees through and despises the shallow manœuvre. None understand better than your most devoted worldlings, the essential incompatibility between their spirit and the spirit of Christ, and they feel nothing but contempt for the weakness which thinks to attain their suffrages by softening down the requisitions of the eternal law. They can read and understand what the Lord requires of them, and their consciences compel them to admire its unapproachable purity. They feel for it something of the reverence and awe, which it is suited to impress on every intelligent mind. And when they perceive its guardians and friends so insensible or so faithless to its claims, as to press upon men something inferior in its stead, they view them as traitors, and instead of embracing, on their invitation, a cause which is thus unfaithfully dealt with, they turn with contempt and loathing from the false-hearted

men. The cowardly and short-sighted policy has repelled from christianity the very men it was designed to conciliate and win.

Christianity is designed to produce a great effect upon men and the world. But not a mixed, adulterated, mitigated christianity. It produces its effects by *what it is*. Change it, and its power ceases ; make it something else, and its operations are no longer the same. Say that instead of going down into the bottom of the soul, and taking possession of the whole man, and informing his entire spirit and character, it is sufficient that it regulate his exterior deportment and restrain him from the grosser sins, — you alter its character ; — it is no longer what Christ taught, and it can no longer produce the effects which he proposed. It will excite a feeble interest, it will awaken a feeble emotion, it will therefore call forth slight exertion, and will end in a feeble virtue. Little will be felt, little therefore attempted, very little accomplished. Make the way very broad and easy, and many will walk in it ; but whither will it lead them ? There can be nothing of the striving, the earnestness, the energy, by which alone great characters are formed, and great enterprises achieved, and an exalted virtue reached. It is not the languor of an easy path which elevates and perfects ; we



must enter in by a strait gate, we must strive through a narrow path; we must seize the kingdom of heaven by violence. We must feel that everything is at stake, and then we shall be ready to attempt everything. Make our way so easy that nothing shall seem to be at stake, and we shall attempt nothing.

It is perfectly true, and Gibbon was right when he said it, though the unhappy man did it maliciously, — that Christianity gained on the world and flourished at the beginning through its very sternness and austerity. It was uncompromising in its strictness, and thus compelled attention, respect, admiration, awe, roused vehement feeling, and forced the homage and allegiance of men. And so it has been in all ages since. The severest forms, the straitest sects, have always had the most resolute followers, have always left the strongest, deepest and most permanent impressions on the world. The looser sects have had their votaries, but they have not exercised the greatest power, nor done so much to decide the fortunes of the world. Even at the present day, when monkish austerity is wholly out of vogue, and all superstitious strictness derided, yet now, the more of rational severity of doctrine a sect upholds, the more peremptorily it exalts



the standard of religious character, the more sure it is to receive the homage of the multitude, and to commend itself to the thinking friends of society and man. This is agreeable to human nature ; — so much so, that in all ages and all religions, it has been the pretence of universal sanctity, the show and inculcation of a holier and mortified life, upon which the fanatical or ambitious founders of sects have built their success. The most absurd and ridiculous doctrines have thus been recommended. But what sect is to be named, which has signally prospered by an opposite policy and a looser doctrine ? — unless indeed by such a degree of laxity as has become freedom from all moral restraint, and has thus destroyed its pretence to be called a religious body. It is idle to think that it may be otherwise now. The world is said to be more intelligent ; society is cultivated and refined. But unless religion be absolutely discarded, men still believe in its exalted purity and holiness ; and that form of religion will command the surest homage and do the best work, which shall offer the severest standard of moral and spiritual attainment, alike free from timid concession to the spirit of the world, and from weak tendency to fanaticism and superstition ; in other words, which shall suc-

ceed most truly in representing the character of Christ ; — as bold, as unflinching in principle as he, yet as gentle, as amiable, and as free from all extravagance and eccentricity.

This, I say to those whom I address, is what you are to desire and aim at. You might as well be no christians at all, as be satisfied with anything less than this. You might as well abandon all hope of progress and prosperity now, as struggle on hoping to succeed by a power of personal religion less than this. Nothing less than this is the christian character ; and neither human nature, nor the providence of God, nor the spirit of grace, will permit any satisfactory attainments to be made in goodness, by those who would substitute some other standard of goodness for that of the christian scriptures. No such attempt can succeed. Nothing but true principle can create true virtue. If you think to render the true principle more palatable to men or better adapted to them, by diluting it down to the taste of the worldly, you change it from what it is, you destroy precisely that which constitutes its efficiency, namely, its truth, and thus you render it the same in effect as falsehood. Christianity cannot be made this accommodating system without ceasing to be Christianity.

It is necessary, then, to insist on a high and

uncompromising standard. It were a poor thing to contend for a religion which bends to our tastes, conforms to our habits, humors our prejudices, and connives at our selfishness. All these we might have without a religious system as well as with it. No doctrine is worth a rational regard, which will not *do something* for us, — which will not lift us out of ourselves and above the world, and transform us in the renewing of our minds, and make us fully conformed to the holy, acceptable and perfect will of God. Pure and undefiled religion, says the apostle James, consists in *Holiness* and *Love*; it is to “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep one’s self unspotted from the world.” Our faith is worth little to us, if it do not effect this. We may glory in it as we please; it is but a worthless name, if it do not issue in purity and philanthropy, — if it do not work by love and purify the heart. We may argue for it with what power of demonstration we please, we may eulogize it as with the tongues of angels; if it have not wrought in us the great transformation which Christ designed, if it do not prove its divinity by its effects on character, who will heed the tones of admiration in which we laud it? who will credit our sincerity?

I would ask, with all humility and earnest-

ness, whether the community is awake to these considerations? We need not overlook the disadvantages of its position. We may make due allowance for the encumbrances and drawbacks which result from the circumstances under which it has come into existence, and from the heterogeneous character which has been imparted to it by the confusion and troubles of the times. To these circumstances I have adverted on a former page; they are such as to demand a charitable judgment and candid allowance, which will by many be denied them. But make what allowance may be reasonable, still, if circumstances are unpropitious, there is only the more imperative call for exertion in order to surmount them, and to do our duty in spite of them. To yield to them, to acquiesce in their neutralizing and palsyng influences, to suffer them to put to sleep our zeal and philanthropy, would be unpardonable treachery to a great trust. May we abandon a cause because circumstances are adverse? May we labor in it languidly, for the very reason that vehement efforts are requisite in order to its advancement? We have in view one grand object, — namely, to ensure to Christianity its full, its legitimate authority in society and over men. In order to this, we are pro-

fessedly seeking to extend and complete the Reformation. If there be impediments in any of the circumstances and accidents of the times, they must be strenuously resisted. Every means must be employed, every heart and hand must be engaged. The pulpit must assume a more earnest and stimulating tone, and the press a more determined emphasis, and thus urge home upon the conscience of the community the fervent, bold, persevering expostulations which the sacred importance of the enterprise demands. Every believer must apply himself to the work, and inquire, and talk, and pray, and act, until all arrive at that elevation of the spiritual life, which as yet is only approached, but which must be *arrived at* before a christian community can be fully worthy of its name.

The signs of the times are favorable. The movement has been long begun, and is prosperously going on. May God speed it ! Our churches, our sunday schools, our books, and our various organizations for mutual aid and charitable action, are gratifying tokens of advancement ; they show that the true spirit is at work ; they encourage us to labor and pray for its extension, confident that God will hear our prayer, and that success will reward our labors. Let us then redouble our labors and

our prayers. Let us contend valiantly for these practical and spiritual achievements. The times are propitious, all things are ready, there is something for every man to do. Every man has first of all a mighty work to finish in his own character ; — he has, in watchfulness and prayer, to govern and perfect his own spirit, and, in disinterested love, to seek the good of those around him. He has to do his share toward the diffusion of elevated principles, toward giving a christian tone to the society in which he moves, toward imbuing its conversation, its spirit, its habits, with the purity, gentleness, peacefulness, and love of right, which ought to characterize communities of christians. Much activity is requisite in order to this end. Very much is to be done to make society what it should be ; very much before it will realize the image drawn in the New Testament. It can be effected only by the strenuous fidelity of individual christians ; and no one can be accounted guiltless, who neglects by word and example to do all in his power to hasten the desirable consummation.

But individuals cannot do it alone. Their single action will effect something ; but it is their combined action only which can bring about the perfect result. And therefore, —

if I am asked what is the great lesson of expediency and duty to be drawn from the survey now taken of the position, character, circumstances and relations of this christian community, — I should answer, the imperious necessity of more general and affectionate union and cöoperation in the cause of truth and happiness. I should say, you stand in a peculiar posture, you are pledged to a peculiar work, — peculiar and vast ; — you are embarrassed by peculiar and multifarious impediments ; — and nothing but the loftiest virtue, and the most devoted faith, and the most energetic and unquenchable zeal, will enable you to carry through your work and accomplish what Providence has apparently offered to you to accomplish. Under such circumstances, it is impossible that the single-handed efforts of insulated individuals shall be sufficient. The requisite zeal cannot be kindled, the necessary determination cannot be excited, the needed information cannot be spread, without much communion of mind with mind, much action of heart on heart. You must unite your hearts, your prayers, your strength. You must meet together, and talk about these things ; excite, encourage, admonish each other, provoke one another to love and good works. Devotion, in this cold world,



needs the cheering stimulus of sympathy; virtue, in this tempting world, needs the strength of public countenance; philanthropy, in this selfish world, requires the support and courage of numbers. You must pray together in social circles assembled for the purpose; converse together of your trials, wants and duties, of the demands of the truth, of the necessities of the church, of the capacities, glories, infirmities, degradation, and destiny of this immortal nature; and thus enkindle a livelier flame of piety, a warmer zeal for truth, a bolder action for charity, and a more eager aspiration after the spiritual life. In order to this end, I know nothing to be more earnestly desired, than the increase of these means of social and mutual religious improvement. The times cry out for them. Wherever adopted, they have been signally blessed. So few have the ability to excite their own souls and set themselves to work that thousands, when left alone, would sink down to cold inactive selfishness, who, if placed in frequent contact with their fellow-believers, would become generous, ardent, enterprising promoters of every good design.

But whatever may be thought of the *means* that should be employed, there can be no doubtfulness respecting the greatness of the *object*. The hints which I have rudely thrown



out on the peculiarities, the hazards, the responsibilities of the present crisis might be extended to a volume, and ought to be written in characters of fire. Weakly as they are here presented, they cannot be wholly without force ; and if any man of powerful and earnest mind perceives their justice and urgency, I leave it in charge with him to set them forth in their proper strength, and press them on the attention and conscience of the public. If I can rouse one such mind to speak to the times in the prophet-like tone in which they ought to be addressed, I shall feel that I have not ventured to lift my voice in vain. At any rate I have attempted to perform a duty.

“ But all is in His hand, whose praise I seek ;  
Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,  
Whose approbation — prosper even mine.”





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